

755 The first part of the most common treatment consisted of steaming the  
 757 sick man, a practice which may have had a magical significance. A ditch, as long as a man, was dug in the ground. Heated stones were scattered in the bottom and covered with a thick layer of banana leaves and grass upon which the patient was laid. Heat and steam were believed to have a favorable action upon his health. After the steaming, the *ivi-atua* completed the cure. First he entered the sick man's hut and stayed there for a long time, trying to learn which spirit had entered the patient. He then held a mysterious conversation with the god or demon who had taken possession of the man's body. This interview was considered very beneficial to the patient. If the demon proved reluctant to leave the sick man, the *ivi-atua* conducted a violent expulsion. The hut was closed; sometimes it was covered with a net. The *ivi-atua* chased the demon and, taking up the clothes of the sick man, he shouted, "Light a fire." Holding the object in which the demon was supposed to be, he ran toward the fire and threw his bundle into it. He remained beside the hearth until everything was burned; then he returned to his patient and said to him, "Now you are in good health." In a severe case the *ivi-atua* might burn the house. He stayed near the fire trying to capture the demon or to keep it in the flame. If, despite all his efforts, the patient died, death was attributed to another spirit (*akuhaku*) who had taken possession of him. The *ivi-atua* received food and carved objects of wood as reward for his services.

757 The medical art included much knowledge and many practices which were efficient aids in healing, and probably was far richer than our present information shows. Massage was used on tired people. Thomson (215, p. 571) tells that during his trip around the island he fell down completely exhausted several times. He yielded "... to the dexterous kneadings and frictions and palmings and pinchings of those skilled in the treatment," and adds that "... the hardfisted native is by no means gentle in the operation, but with palms and knuckles vigorously tests every muscle and tendon, as well as every joint of the vertebrae, until the exhausted patient sinks into a state of oblivious somnolence." A most popular method of removing stomach pains, especially those produced by starvation, was to bind a cord tightly around the waist. Another method was to pile on the stomach a large heap of stones. This treatment is similar to that practiced by Easter Island women after childbirth in which they pressed their wombs with stones to prevent the formation of folds (121, p. 660).

278 The Easter Island pharmacopoeia was probably small. The flora of the island is extremely poor and I doubt if there are many plants with medical virtues. The present natives, when asked about their local drugs, mentioned only the introduced bamboo (*koko*), which is said to be good for toothache when boiled or roasted and placed on the aching tooth. Thomson (215, p. 471) writes: "The thistle is bruised and applied to sores and ulcers, arrow-